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SYSTEM FOR AUTOMATIC IDENTIFICATION OF TARGETS

The present invention relates to the automatic identification of targets present in an image. More precisely this invention describes a discriminating procedure making it possible to compare 2D contours. It applies mainly in the military field, in order to assist the pilot of an aircraft in a combat situation in his choices of firing. It is also of interest in any other field relating to shape recognition, in particular, the field of surveillance and the medical field.

An automatic identification process must make it possible to reliably determine how many targets there are in the image, what positions they are at and what types they are.

By target is understood a 3D object that one seeks to identify. In the military field, these targets are typically tanks, terrestrial vehicles, etc. In what follows, we shall speak either of targets or of objects.

In the present patent application, identification system is understood to mean a system through which a target in an image is identified by its type: make, name or number, or else by its class: car, tank, coach, etc.

The automatic identification of objects or targets is a complex algorithmic problem on account on the one hand of potential resemblances between two different targets from certain angles of view, and on the other hand of the large variability of appearance of a target, due to geometrical deformations, to the position of certain elements, or to the presence of certain equipment. For example, a vehicle may have open or closed doors, baggage on the roof, etc.

One seeks to automatically identify, in the most reliable manner possible, targets in an image. The automatic identification process must thus exhibit two essential qualities: be robust, that is to say hardly sensitive to variations of appearance of a target which give rise to local perturbations on the object in the image; be discriminating, that is to say be capable of discerning between two targets that are close in appearance.

In the invention, one is more particularly interested in an automatic system for identifying targets that is based on comparing contours. In such a system, firstly, the contours present in the image to be analyzed are extracted and then, secondly, these contours are compared with those of a reference base of targets, containing data representing the 3D objects that one seeks to identify.

The extraction of the contours present in the image is done with the aid of a technique referred to as segmentation. The result is a so-called *extracted contours* image, corresponding to a binary image depicting nothing other than pixels of contours, represented in general by white points on a black background. In this image, only the pixels of contours contain information. In what follows, unless explicitly mentioned to the contrary, a point is to be understood to mean a point carrying information, that is to say a point belonging to a contour in the template or in the image. The pixels which are not contour points are not information carriers.

10 The image of extracted contours is then compared with the contours obtained from a database representing the 3D objects that one seeks to identify. These contours are said to be *template-contours* and are obtained, for each of the 3D objects, by projection according to a set of viewpoints making it possible to represent all the appearances of the object. To each 3D
15 object in the base there thus corresponds a collection of template-contours of this object.

 In the invention, one is more particularly interested in a so-called correlative comparison procedure, which consists in comparing each template contour with the image of extracted contours for all the possible
20 positions of this template contour in the image. For a given position, this comparison is performed by superimposing the template contour on the image, and consists in measuring the "discrepancy" between the points of the template contour and those of the image of extracted contours. Each of the template-contours being tagged with respect to an origin, it is possible to
25 recalculate the coordinates of each of its points in the coordinate system of the image of contours, according to the image pixel on which this origin is centered. Each of the template-contours is thus scanned over the whole of the image of extracted contours.

 When the image of extracted contours has been scanned by the whole
30 set of template-contours, the process consists in selecting the most likely hypothesis or hypotheses.

 Hypothesis is understood to mean a target, a position of this target in the image and a viewpoint from which this target is observed.

A procedure for evaluating the discrepancy between the points of template contours and the points of extracted contours consists in counting up the number of points that these contours have in common.

5 This simple evaluation procedure based on the number of points in common with a template contour is however not very robust and not very discriminating. It is not very robust since it is highly sensitive to the variations in appearance of the target and not very discriminating since it takes all the points of the contour into account with the same importance.

10 Another more complex evaluation procedure uses a so-called Hausdorff measure method. This method consists in identifying for each of the points of a template contour, the smallest distance from this point to the points of the image contour, and in deducing therefrom a degree of dissimilarity between the template contour and the image contour, on the basis of the mean of the distances evaluated.

15 However, this method although it is more competitive than the previous one is not sufficiently robust or discriminating, since it may take account of irrelevant distances which ought to be discarded. Specifically, one and the same point of a template contour may be viewed as closest to several different points of the image contour. This is the case in particular if the
20 image contains spurious points which do not correspond to a contour of a target to be identified, for example, points which correspond to internal contours of the target, or points which correspond to the environment of the target (vegetation, buildings, etc). These spurious points will perturb the measurement. Taking all these distances into account may thus lead to a
25 false hypothesis.

A subject of the invention is an automatic identification process which does not exhibit these various drawbacks.

An automatic identification process according to the invention comprises a method of measurement of proximity of a template contour to an
30 image contour based on a step of one-to-one pairing of each point of a template contour to zero or one points of the image contour.

This method of pointwise pairing comprises a step of associating, with each point of the image contour, of the point of the template contour that is closest. In this step, two items of information are matched up with each point
35 of the image contour: the coordinates of a point of the template contour

determined as being the closest and the distance between the two points thus associated.

Then, inversely, for each point of the template contour, the whole set of points of the image contour which have been associated with it in the previous step is considered and in this set, the point of the image contour that is closest is determined by taking the smallest distance. A pointwise one-to-one pairing is obtained. On output, each point of the template contour is paired either with zero points of the image contour or with one point of the image contour corresponding to the smallest distance.

By allocating a local score of proximity to each point of the template contour, equal to zero if it is paired to zero points of the image contour, and if it is paired to one point of the image contour, equal to a value that is all the smaller the larger the distance between the two paired points, it is possible to calculate a global score, equal to the mean of the local scores which expresses the probability of similarity of the template contour to the image contour.

The global score which results from this procedure is much more discriminating than the proximity measure used in the methods of automatic identification of the prior art, in particular in relation to false hypotheses.

An automatic identification system according to the invention uses this method for each position of the template contour in the image, and for each template of a collection of templates.

The set of global scores obtained, corresponding to the various template contours and to their various positions in the image, makes it possible to devise a certain number of hypotheses, adopting the best global scores of proximity.

The pointwise pairing process according to the invention makes it possible to improve the discrimination of the automatic identification system in relation to false hypotheses corresponding to cases where the contours in the image comprise interior points of contours, that is to say corresponding to internal contours of a target, and exterior points of contours, that is to say corresponding to the environment of the target (vegetation, buildings, etc).

According to another aspect of the invention, to improve the discrimination between hypotheses of targets which are superimposed (that is to say at positions that are identical or close in the image, this customarily

being defined by contour points in common between the two hypotheses of template contours), the method of proximity measurement applies a local weighting at each point of a template contour. This weighting is representative of an amount of information contained at this point and defined with respect to the other template contour. This weighting makes it possible to discriminate the silhouettes of the two targets on the basis of their local differences. More particularly, this weighting consists in applying the method of measurement of proximity between the two template contours to be discriminated, so as to obtain, for each template contour, a weighting factor at each point which makes it possible to give more weight to the points of the template contour which contain the information regarding differences with the other template contour. When the collection of hypotheses contains more than two superimposable hypotheses, this weighting process is applied pairwise, and the best global score obtained each time is adopted.

The automatic identification system according to the invention applies to each of the template contours of a collection, the process of measurement of proximity of this template contour to the image contour to be analyzed so as to evaluate the likelihood of this template and between the template contours taken in pairs into a selection of hypotheses which are superimposed, so as to discriminate between two template contours that are close by locally weighting this probability relative to each of the two templates.

Thus, as characterized, the invention relates to a method of measurement of proximity of a second contour to a first contour, comprising for each point of the first contour, a step of association with a point of the second contour determined as the closest, characterized in that it comprises a step of pairing each point of the second contour with one or zero points of the first contour, by determining the point of the first contour which is closest from among the set of points of the first contour that are associated with said point of the second contour.

The invention also relates to a method of automatic identification of targets, which uses such a method of measurement of proximity of a template contour to an image contour.

According to an improvement, this method of identification uses this method of measurement of proximity of a template contour to another

template contour, to allow discrimination between two hypotheses which are superimposed.

Other advantages and characteristics of the invention will become
5 more clearly apparent on reading the description which follows, given by way of nonlimiting indication of the invention and with reference to the appended drawings, in which:

-figure 1 represents an image of contours that is extracted from an input image applied to a system for the automatic identification of contours;

10 -figure 2 illustrates the step of associating a point of the image with a point of a template contour according to a method of measurement of proximity of a template contour to the image contour to be analyzed according to the invention;

-figure 3 illustrates the step of pointwise pairing according to a method
15 of measurement of proximity of a template contour to the image contour to be analyzed according to the invention;

-figures 4a and 4b illustrate a problem of detection of false hypotheses;

-figures 5a and 5b illustrate the orientation classes associated with the points of the image and template contours;

20 -figure 6 represents the curve associated with an exemplary function for allocating a local score of proximity according to the invention;

-figures 7a to 7d illustrate the principle of weighting of the local weighting score according to the invention.

25 Figure 1 represents an image of contours that are extracted from a data image, which can emanates from an infrared camera, from a video system, or from any other source of images.

We wish to determine in this image of extracted contours how many targets it contains, at what positions and of what types, from among a set of
30 identified targets, which we have in the form of 3D objects in a database. To do this, we construct a set of 2D template contours corresponding to projections of each of the 3D objects, according to various angles of view, taking account of the information on the conditions under which the targets are observed, such as for example, information regarding the distance
35 between the target and the sensor, view angles, etc.

Let us consider a template contour, denoted CM, positioned in any manner in the image of extracted contours. In what follows, the set of points of contours of the image of extracted contours is called the image contour CI. We apply a method of measurement of proximity according to the invention
5 to measure the proximity of this contour CM to the image contour to be analyzed.

Figure 1 illustrates an image of contours extracted from an image obtained in any manner: infrared image, active image. It contains points of the image contour which correspond to the black pixels on this image, such
10 as the points referenced I_a , I_b , I_c , I_d in figure 1. These contour points may be contour points of a target to be identified, such as the point I_a , points external to the contour of the target to be identified, such as the points I_b and I_c or else points of a contour internal to the target to be identified, such as the point I_d .

The method of measurement of proximity according to the invention
15 comprises a step of one-to-one pairing of each of the points of the template contour to zero or a single point of the image contour and a step of allocating a local score of proximity to each point of the template contour, representing the proximity of this point of the template contour with the image contour.

More precisely, the step of pairing each of the points of the template
20 contour comprises steps a)- and b)- below:

a)-a step of associating with each point of the image contour a point of the template contour, on the criterion of the smallest distance;

b)-for each point of the template contour, the determination of the set
of image contour points with which it was associated in step a)-, and the
25 determination of the closest image point in this set, on the criterion of the smallest distance.

This method requires that, in step a)-, two items of information are stored for each point of the image contour: the coordinates of the associated template contour point and the corresponding distance between the two
30 associated points, so as to perform step b)- of pairing on the basis of these two items of information.

The distance considered is the Euclidean distance, a true measurement or a discrete measurement of which is performed according to the calculation procedures used. In particular, the use of a chamfer

procedure, making it possible in a known manner to speed up the calculation time, uses a discrete measure of the Euclidean distance.

Steps a)- and b)- are illustrated in figures 2 and 3.

Step a)- is illustrated in figure 2. We evaluate the proximity of the
 5 points of the image contour CI with the template contour CM, so as to
 associate with each point of the image contour a point of the template
 contour that is closest. Thus, as represented in figure 2, if we take a point of
 the image contour CI, the evaluation of the point of the template contour that
 is closest consists in searching for the smallest distance d between this point
 10 of the image contour and a point of the template contour. In the example
 represented in figure 2, this evaluation leads to the associating of the point
 M_1 of the template contour CM with the point I_1 of the image contour CI. In
 this example, we also have the following associations: (I_1, M_1) , (I_2, M_1) , (I_3, M_1) ,
 (I_4, M_2) , (I_5, M_2) , (I_6, M_3) .

15 In the course of this step, one and the same point of the template
 contour may be associated with different points of the image contour. In the
 example, the point M_1 of the template contour CM has been associated with
 the points I_1 , I_2 , I_3 of the image contour.

Step b)- is illustrated in figure 3. It consists for each point of the
 20 template contour, in selecting from among the points of the image contour
 which were associated with it in the first step a), the point of the image
 contour that is closest to the point of the template contour. In figure 3, dotted
 lines represent the matching up of points of the image contour with points of
 the template contour according to the first step a). For each template contour
 25 point, we thus have 0, 1 or n points of the image contour that are associated
 according to this step a). For example, for the image contour point M_{15} , we
 have three associated points of the image contour: I_{24} , I_{28} , and I_{29} .

Step b)- consists in keeping only the closest image point, when it
 30 exists, from among the image contour points associated with one and the
 same template contour point and in evaluating the local score of proximity of
 this template contour point to the image contour on the basis of the pairing
 (template contour point-image contour point) thus performed.

In the example of figure 3, the pairing of point M_i (template) to point I_k (image) according to the invention is as follows: $(M_{10}, \text{zero image points})$; (M_{11}, I_{20}) ; (M_{12}, I_{21}) ; (M_{13}, I_{22}) ; (M_{15}, I_{24}) .

With a pointwise pairing according to the invention, the contour points
5 for image I_{25} to I_{29} will therefore not be taken into account in the evaluation of the proximity of the template.

The step of pointwise pairing according to the invention provides for each point M_i of the template contour M_i paired with a single point of the image contour I_k , a measure of proximity of this point M_i to the image contour.
10 This measure of proximity of the point M_i may be written:

$\text{Dist}(M_i) = d(M_i, I_k)$, where $d(M_i, I_k)$ is a true or approximate measure of the Euclidean distance between the two paired points. It is expressed as a number of pixels.

15 The method furthermore comprises a step of allocating a local score of proximity to each of the points of the template contour as follows: the score takes a value lying between 0 and 1, all the greater the closer the paired points (the smaller the proximity measure for this point). More precisely:

-if a point of the template contour is not reached by any point of the
20 image contour, corresponding to a point of the template contour that is very far from the image contour, it is allocated the score zero. In the example of figure 3, the score allocated to the point M_{10} is zero: $N(M_{10})=0$.

- if a point of the template contour is reached by a single point of the image contour, it is assigned a score that is all the larger the closer the
25 points. For example, we could have $N(M_{12})=0.7$; $N(M_{15})=0.3$.

The last step of the method then consists in determining the global score for the template, by averaging the local scores of all the points of the template contour.

According to this principle of evaluation, the template contour is
30 evaluated as being all the closer to an image contour the higher the global score allocated to it.

It has been possible to show that such a process of automatic identification of targets according to the invention makes it possible to avoid
35 detection errors of the type illustrated in figures 4a and 4b. In these figures, a

first template MOD_1 (figure 4a) and a second template MOD_2 (figure 4b) have been superimposed on an image 1 comprising a target C. The first template MOD_1 corresponds in the example to the target to be detected on which it is perfectly positioned. It leads to an adopted hypothesis. The second template
 5 corresponds to another type of target. However, with a method according to the state of the art, the hypothesis will be adopted, on account of the presence of points of contours not belonging to the contour of the target, but belonging in reality to the background, or to points of internal contours.

According to an embodiment of the invention, the evaluation of the
 10 local score of proximity of each point of the template contour is a function of the distance d between this point and the point of the image contour paired according to the invention.

Preferably, and as represented diagrammatically in figures 5a and 5b, the evaluation of the proximity of two points comprises the involvement of the
 15 class of orientation at the points I_{20} and M_{30} of the pair P considered. This class is typically defined by the orientation of the tangent of the contour at the point considered: represented in figure 5a is the tangent t_I at the image contour point I_{20} of the image contour CI and the tangent t_M at the template contour point M_{30} of the template contour CM . We define n orientation
 20 classes with n an integer: orientation class 0 corresponds to a horizontal orientation of the tangent; orientation class $n-1$ corresponds to a vertical orientation of the tangent and each of the intermediate orientation classes corresponds to an orientation of the tangent that is determined, lying between 0 and π rads. These classes are represented in figure 5b with $n=8$. In this
 25 example, the point I_{20} belongs to orientation class 6 and the point M_{30} belongs to orientation class 5.

In a general manner, if the tangents t_I and t_M coincide, that is to say if the two paired points belong to the same orientation class, then $\Delta ORI = 0$. If the two paired points are in orthogonal classes $\Delta ORI = n-1$. More generally, we
 30 have $\Delta ORI = |\text{class}(I_k) - \text{class}(M_i)|$ (in terms of number of pixels).

In the example represented in figure 5a, $\Delta ORI = 6-5=1$

The corrected measure of proximity to the image contour of the template contour point M_i paired with the image contour point I_k may thus be written:

$$\text{Dist}(M_i) = d(M_i, l_k) + \frac{1}{4} \Delta \text{ORI}.$$

In practice, with $n=8$ classes, a good compromise is obtained in terms of false detections and calculation time.

In this improvement, the proximity measure is a continuous function of position and of orientation. Thus, the weight of the orientation, the latter possibly being estimated erroneously, is limited.

In a variant of involvement of the orientation class, the orientation class is taken into account in the step of association of the pointwise pairing process, by not allowing association (and hence pairing) other than between points of the same class. In this case, the proximity measure $\text{Dist}(M_i)$ is equal to the distance between the two paired points M_i and l_k .

The allocation of the local score of proximity $N(M_i)$ of a point of the template contour M_i as a function of the proximity measure according to the invention must contribute to the robustness of the identification method.

This local score conveys a probability of similarity between the template contour and the image contour: it takes a value on the interval $[0, 1]$. When it is equal to zero, it implies that the template contour point does not "match" with the image contour; when it is equal to 1, it implies a strong probability that the template contour corresponds to the image contour.

Thus, all the points of the template contour which could not be paired with a point of the image contour according to the method of the invention must have a zero contribution, that is to say a zero score, implying that they are very far away from the image contour.

For the points of the template contour that are paired with a single point of the image contour, the function for allocating the score preferably follows the following criteria:

- the score must take a value equal to 1 when the proximity measure $\text{Dist}(M_i)$ is zero;
- the score must take a value of about 1 when the proximity measure $\text{Dist}(M_i)$ lies between 0 and 1.
- the score must decrease very rapidly to zero as soon as the proximity measure $\text{Dist}(M_i)$ becomes greater than 1.
- the curve of allocation of the score $N(M_i)$ possesses a point of inflexion, preferably for a proximity measure $\text{Dist}(M_i)$ of around 2 pixels.

- the score must take a quasi-zero value as soon as the proximity measure $\text{Dist}(M_i)$ becomes greater than 3 pixels.

The function $N(M_i)$ for allocating the score to a point of the template contour M_i paired according to the invention to the point of the image contour I_k will have for example the shape represented in figure 6, which corresponds to the following function:

$$N(M_i) = \left(0.5 - \arctan \frac{4(\text{Dist}(M_i) - 2)}{\pi} \right) \frac{1}{0.9604}.$$

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A practical implementation of a method of proximity measurement according to the invention may use so-called chamfer calculation procedures. These chamfer procedures are very efficient in terms of calculation time and are much used in numerous fields of image processing including shape recognition.

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A conventional chamfer procedure makes it possible for a contour to be matched up with a map having two inputs x and y corresponding to the coordinates of a given point, and having an output, which is the smallest distance from this point (x,y) to the contour. Stated otherwise, we evaluate the smallest distance from the point (x,y) to the contour mapped by means of level curves. This known chamfer procedure is generally used to apply the Hausdorff measure method. In this case, the chamfer procedure is applied to the image contour, making it possible to determine for each point (x,y) of the template contour, the smallest distance to the image contour.

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In the method according to the invention, the chamfer procedure must be applied in a different way.

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Initially, in the first step of association of the method according to the invention, we seek to measure the smallest distance from a point of the image contour to the template contour. This now involves applying the chamfer procedure to each of the template contours rather than to the image contour.

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However, the calculation of the chamfer map of a template contour is independent of the image of extracted contours to be analyzed. These

calculations may therefore be performed once and for all and stored, to be utilized in due course, in real time, for the analysis of a given contour image.

Next, to allow the pointwise pairing according to the invention, the chamfer map of the template contour must provide as output a first item of
 5 information which is the distance between the two associated points, and a second item of information which is the identification of the template contour point associated with this distance. This second item of information is necessary since this is what will make it possible in the pairing step to determine the set of image contour points associated with one and the same
 10 template contour point, and to automatically deduce therefrom the measure of proximity through the first associated item of information.

Thus, a fast calculation method according to the invention comprises the calculation of a chamfer map for each template contour, said map giving, as a function of the two inputs x and y corresponding to the coordinates of an
 15 image contour point, an item of information $S_0(x,y)$ identifying the template contour point reached by the smallest distance measure, and an item of information $S_1(x,y)$ corresponding to the value of this measure.

Next, we apply the steps of pointwise pairing and of allocation of a local score to each point of the template contour, dependent on the proximity
 20 measure $\text{Dist}(M_i)$ for the paired points.

This procedure does not make it possible to correct the measure of proximity $\text{Dist}(M_i)$ of a point of the template contour M_i as a function of the class of orientation of this point and of the paired image contour point I_k .

25 Provision is then made to calculate a chamfer map per class of orientation of the template contour. We therefore have n chamfer maps per template contour. We have seen that, preferably, $n=8$.

The step of associating a point of the template contour with each point of the image contour then comprises, for each point of the image contour, the
 30 prior determination of the orientation class of this point, and the selection of the chamfer map of the template contour from the corresponding orientation class.

Finally, the calculation of the global score η consists in averaging all the local scores, i.e., if the template contour comprises l template contour points $M_{i=1 \text{ to } l}$,
$$\eta = \frac{1}{l} \sum_{i=1}^l N(M_i).$$

The method according to the invention is applied to all the template
5 contours, scanning them over the whole image each time.

We obtain a global score for each template contour (template contour to be understood as template contour in a given position), which is a measure of probability of similitude of this template contour to the image contour.

10 For example, we obtain the global score η_1 for template contour CM_1 ; η_2 for template contour CM_2 , etc.

Preferably, we then establish a selection of hypotheses. The word hypothesis is understood to mean a template contour (that is to say a target, from a certain viewpoint) in a determined position in the image.

15 The selection is typically obtained by adopting the most probable hypotheses corresponding to a global score obtained that is greater than a decision threshold. This threshold is preferably fixed at 0.6.

The implementation of such a process of automatic identification of
20 targets using a method of proximity measurement according to the invention makes it possible to decrease the number of false alarms and to better discriminate between the various hypotheses. Stated otherwise, fewer hypotheses are adopted at output.

The table below shows by way of comparison, for different images
25 containing a sole target to be identified, the number of hypotheses adopted on the criterion of the Hausdorff measure (hypothesis adopted if Hausdorff measure < 2 pixels) and on the criterion of the global score of proximity ($\eta > 0.6$) according to the invention. It is seen that the selection criterion based on the proximity score according to the invention gives better results in terms
30 of rejection of false hypotheses.

	Image 1	Image 2	Image 3	Image 4	Image 5	Image 6	Image 7	Image 8
Hausdorff	4	5	3	2	3	7	2	8
Global score η	3	2	0	2	3	2	0	4

On the other hand, it does not allow truly conclusive improvement in discrimination between two targets with close silhouettes. This is implied by the presence of superimposable hypotheses in the selection of hypotheses that is obtained. The concept of hypotheses which are superimposed is a concept well known to the person skilled in the art. It implies that the template contours of these hypotheses have contour points in common.

Another aspect of the invention makes it possible to improve this latter point.

10 The problem more particularly considered here is due to the fact that, at certain angles of view, for certain orientations, two targets may have relatively similar silhouettes that are close in the sense of the global score η allocated according to the invention.

Nevertheless, in practice the presence of localized differences may be noted. When dealing with military vehicles for example, this is perhaps the presence of tracks or wheels; a substantially different length; a rounded shape or on the contrary an angular shape, etc.

Certain parts of a template contour are therefore more informative than others relative to another template contour.

20 Figure 7d thus shows an image contour CI corresponding to an image of extracted contours. Two templates CM_1 and CM_2 represented respectively in figure 7a and figure 7b, are found to be close in the sense of the invention to this image contour.

The idea on which the refinement according to the invention is based consists in considering the two hypotheses which are superimposed, and in weighting the local score of each point of a template contour, this score having been established in the measure of proximity of this template contour to the image contour, by an amount of information representing the local difference at this point, with the other template contour.

30 According to the invention, the associated global score η_1 of the template contour CM_1 which measures the probability of similitude of this template contour CM_1 to the image contour CI is obtained by weighting each of the local scores. More precisely, the local score of proximity $N(M1_i)$ of each point $M1_i$ of the template contour CM_1 is weighted by a factor representative at this point of the amount of discriminating information which

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it contains with respect to the other template contour CM_2 . This amount of information contained at a point $M1_i$ of the template contour CM_1 should be all the higher the further away this point is from the other template contour CM_2 : this is the very definition of the measure of proximity at this point
 5 Dist($M1_i$) according to the method of the invention.

The amount of information of each of the points $M1_i$ of the first contour CM_1 relative to the contour CM_2 is therefore defined as follows:

$$X(M1_i) = \text{Dist}(M1_i) = d(M1_i, M2_j).$$

where $M2_j$ is a point of the template contour CM_2 paired with the point
 10 $M1_i$ according to the method of proximity measurement of the invention. At a given point of the contour template CM_1 , the larger the distance from the paired point, the bigger the amount of information at this point. This is represented diagrammatically in figure 7c. At the point $M1_a$, the amount of information $X(M1_a)$ is large, corresponding to the distance d_a in the figure.

15 At the point $M1_b$, the amount of information $X(M1_b)$ is zero, since at this point the two contours merge.

The procedures for chamfer calculation and for involving the orientation of the points in the distance measure that were described previously apply in the same way to this calculation of amount of information.

20 The method of weighting according to the invention then consists, in the step of calculating the global score η_1 of the contour CM_1 to the image contour, in weighting the local score of proximity of each point $M1_i$ of the template contour CM_1 by the associated amount of information $X(M1_i)$, i.e.:

$$\eta_1 = \frac{1}{m} \sum_{i=1}^m N(M1_i) \cdot X(M1_i).$$

25 We apply the method of weighting to the points of the second contour CM_2 , inverting the role of the first and second contours, that is to say using the method of measurement of proximity of the second contour CM_2 to the first contour CM_1 : we obtain the amount of information $X(M2_j)$ of each point $M2_j$ of the second contour CM_2 relative to the first contour CM_1 . We weight
 30 the local score of proximity $N(M2_j)$ of each point $M2_j$ by the associated amount of information $X(M2_j)$. The global score η_2 is obtained by averaging the weighted local score of proximity of each of the points of the template contour CM_2 , i.e.

$$\eta_2 = \frac{1}{l} \sum_{j=1}^l N(M2_j).X(M2_j).$$

Thus, more weight is given to the parts of the template contour which have the most information with respect to the others.

Stated otherwise, this amounts to discriminating between the two
5 hypotheses on the basis of the contour points which contain the most information with respect to the other.

This concept of amount of information is therefore defined with respect to a given pair of template contours.

When more than two hypotheses are superimposed, we apply the
10 method of discrimination pairwise.

Thus the invention describes a method of measurement of proximity of a second contour to a first contour, according to which each point M_i of the second contour is paired with one or zero points of the first contour, giving a
15 measure of proximity $\text{Dist}(M_i)$ at this point.

A method of automatic identification of targets according to the invention applies this proximity measurement process to determine the measurement of proximity of each point of a template contour, applied as second contour, to an image contour, applied as first contour. From this it
20 deduces for each point of the template contour, a local score of proximity and for the template contour, a global score, giving a measure of probability of similitude to the image contour.

The method of automatic identification thus determines the global score associated with each of the template contours of a collection (with as
25 many different template contours as different 3D templates and as viewpoints considered for each 3D template).

According to another aspect of the invention, it applies a criterion for selecting hypotheses, adopting as probable hypothesis, each of the template contours whose global score is greater than the threshold.

30 According to a variant, the template contours of the collection correspond to a selection of hypotheses, that arises from another process, for example, that arises from a Hausdorff measure.

According to another aspect of the invention, the method of automatic identification then applies the method of weighting to each pair of hypotheses

which are superimposed from among the hypotheses adopted, to obtain for the template contour associated with each hypothesis, a global score weighted according to the invention. To do this, it uses the method of proximity measurement, applying it a first time to measure the amount of information associated with each point of the contour of the first hypothesis, applied as second contour, relative to the contour of the second hypothesis, applied as first contour, and to calculate the associated global score by averaging the weighted local scores. It applies the method of proximity measurement a second time to measure the amount of information associated with each point of the contour of the second hypothesis, applied as second contour, relative to the contour of the first hypothesis, applied as first contour, and to calculate the associated global score by averaging the weighted local scores. Then, the identification system selects the best hypothesis. If the hypotheses which are superimposed are greater than two in number, the automatic identification system applies this weighting pairwise, so as to adopt the best hypothesis each time.

The performance of a system for the automatic identification of targets using such a method of identification according to the invention has been tested on a workstation, on a base containing 200 images to be analyzed and 9 3D targets corresponding to terrestrial vehicles. A significant improvement in the identification performance was thus demonstrable, with a rate of appropriate identification of 80%, as against 50% obtained with methods of the prior art.

It will be noted that the application of an automatic identification system according to the invention to a first selection of hypotheses that is obtained from another automatic identification process, such as a process using the Hausdorff measure, does not change the identification performance, but advantageously makes it possible to save calculation time.

The invention just described makes it possible to appreciably improve the robustness and the discrimination of an automatic identification system which implements it. It applies to the military field, but more generally, to any field using shape recognition by comparison with a series of templates.